

Middletown is THRIVING

1. Where are we?

Middletown is a thriving small city with a broad and diverse economic portfolio. At the crossroads of and reflecting Connecticut, it is a mix of development densities from a highly urbanized downtown to lightly settled residential areas and broad swaths of unbroken forest blocks. In a demographic era in which the population of Connecticut is projected to be relatively flat and the population of Middlesex County is likely to continue a gradual decline, Middletown is likely to grow. As noted in Figure 3 of the *Demographics and Trends* chapter, population estimates by the Connecticut Data Collaborative anticipate that Middletown's growth will be steady (if not dramatic) over the next decade and will likely top 50,000 residents within the next five years. Similarly, the growth of jobs in Middletown has been steady and positive, and at a much higher rate than both Middlesex County and Connecticut in general.

A community requires growth to thrive. A community that is not growing is a community that becomes stagnant. Growth can be controlled through zoning regulations, but no community can escape the impact that the market conditions on the regional and national levels can have on population growth and economic development. Middletown's Plan of Conservation of Development will likely have little impact on market conditions in Connecticut or New England on a National landscape. However, the Plan of Conservation and Development can help define Middletown's identity, outline its priorities and set policies that can guide the creation of zoning regulations that will ultimately help Middletown growth and thrive.

The wide market and demographic trends over the next decade will be shaped dramatically by two key cohorts – broadly defined as the Baby Boomers and Millennials. Baby Boomers, those Americans born between 1945-1964, make up nearly 80 million people, and by the end of the next decade, will represent the single largest group of senior citizens and retirees the nation has ever seen. At the other end, the Millennial generation (1985-2004), also approximately 80 million strong, will quickly make up the largest cohort of the working population and will be establishing families and moving into leadership positions. The decisions made by these two cohorts will affect the fates of communities like Middletown. It seems clear from recent trends that these groups are embracing more compact, active urban settings with a vibrant diversity of experiences and cultures and outdoor amenities. Reduced dependence on cars, a variety of housing choices, and the opportunity to make a difference locally are of equal importance to these segments of the population. However, these trends are not universal, nor are they permanent. Over the next decade, however, there are few communities in Connecticut that are better positioned than Middletown to appeal to and welcome these potential residents, visitors, and workers.

The 2010 Plan of Conservation & Development contained a great deal of analysis and discussion about population growth, based on a future build-out scenario that projected an ultimate population of approximately 65,000 residents based on current allowable development standards. The final Plan, based on public sentiment, recommended a slower, tighter pace of growth that did not encourage changes to regulations that would encourage higher densities of residential development, with a target population of under 55,000. That Plan was largely

developed in the days before the Great Recession of 2009-11 when Connecticut's growth trajectory was markedly different, and in a demographic environment where the interests and lifestyle preferences of Millennials and retiring Boomers was not quite as evident. This next decade will be quite different from the last. Middletown can and should grow, but it must encourage and guide this growth carefully and equitably. It the goal of this Plan to both embrace and prepare for this growth, creating a Middletown that embraces its diversity of experience, landscape, and culture.

2. What are people saying?

[Insert word cloud from the survey]

Stakeholder and public input gathered at the PoCD charrette, survey, and listening sessions focused on various aspects of the Downtown experience. Middletown is seen as a vibrant and diverse regional asset that has not yet realized the significant development and activity potential that most of the public perceives.

There was a great deal of discussion about parking options in the Downtown core. While the public did not like the large swaths of surface parking, there was still a clear sentiment that the availability of safe, convenient public parking was a priority. Moving away from surface parking to structured parking, and developing a clear plan for parking demand, location, and management was a popular approach.

The details of the downtown experience were also of high priority. Focusing on cleaning up and improving tenancy in vacant and under-used buildings, investing in the streetscape and gateway intersections, supporting arts and culture, and the pedestrian environment were all closely related suggestions. Installation of a municipal broadband network, improving circulation via sidewalk upgrades and transit connections, and working with neighboring communities to improve the heart of Middletown as a "regional downtown" were also mentioned. Supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs, connecting with Wesleyan as a business-development engine, and adding a variety of entertainment options that would extend the hours and variety of activity were all noted as ways to boost the vibrancy of the downtown environment.

There was significant agreement on the need for additional housing downtown. Several residents mentioned the need for the City to target an additional 1,000 housing units downtown, discussing how the increased population would drive demand for services, restaurants, and retail, creating a more stable downtown economy. Others focused on the need for these housing units to be affordable, attractive to millennials and young professionals, and provide walkable, bikeable access to transit, recreation, and commercial amenities.

There was a strong focus on reuse and redevelopment of historic resources both housing and for general commercial development. While there were several comments about the relative unattractiveness of the gateways to Middletown, particularly from Route 9, there was agreement that more efforts and resources should be put into the revitalization of existing buildings and brownfield properties, that reflect the historic fabric of the City rather than focusing on new construction.

The variety of opinions and approaches to use and access to the Riverfront closely reflected the variety of ways the City has used the Connecticut River over the centuries. Whether the use is commercial, recreational, residential, or institutional being advocated, there was near-unanimity about the need to improve access to the River, for all users.

The plans to revise Route 9 should include a strong, convenient, pedestrian-focused bridge connecting Downtown with the waterfront. Existing roadway access points, particularly Union Street, should be strengthened and made more welcoming, particularly as a pedestrian corridor. Refining and drawing from the multiple riverfront studies that have been conducted over the past decade, the City, the public believes, should take an incremental approach and increase access and activity at the River.

3. What are the big ideas?

The nature of the changes to Route 9 is critical to how Middletown progresses.

As the primary artery connecting Middletown with the rest of Connecticut, Route 9 has played an outsized role in how the City is perceived to visitors, potential residents, and investors. With the Connecticut River on one side, and an awkward collection of uses and the back-sides of buildings on the other, this “gateway” to Middletown leaves much room for improvement, even without consideration of the long-ago decision to forego traditional divided-highway interchanges for traffic lights. The long-discussed plans by the Connecticut DOT are nearing the point where final decisions will need to be made, and the direction of the renovations to Route 9 through the core of Middletown will dramatically impact the City’s trajectory for growth over the next two decades. The City and its key stakeholders must be active in ensuring that the Route 9 plans both facilitate connection to the Connecticut River, increase the efficiency of travel to and through Middletown, improve the safety of drivers and pedestrians, and do not further constrain area businesses.

Currently, congestion from the traffic lights negatively impacts economic productivity, environmental degradation, and a significantly negative perception of traveling to and through Middletown. While the elimination of the lights and conversion to a more traditional interchange approach will require a redesign and possible hardship for the new offramp/access areas, including the displacement of some residential areas, the City must be sure that the greater good of Middletown will be served through this reconfiguration. The City’s leaders will need to speak with as much unanimity as possible to work with the DOT and the neighbors to ensure that this decision and transition is handled appropriately and that environmental justice concerns are addressed.

The highway improvements to Route 9 will make accessing Middletown neighborhoods and businesses a more pleasant and efficient process. This infrastructure investment also represents the most significant opportunity to integrate Middletown’s Downtown core with the Riverfront in many decades. The addition of a broad, expansive pedestrian plaza spanning Route 9 and creating a well-designed, friendly, and active connection can function as a focal point and opportunity for reinvention of the perception of Middletown for residents, businesses, and visitors alike. The anchor institutions and stakeholders in Middletown must seize this opportunity.

Build on a strong foundation of anchor institutions to drive growth.

The “Innovation Places” program as established and defined by the quasi-public institution Connecticut Innovations focuses on the power of anchor institutions to drive economic and community development through creative collaboration and fostering of innovation. The permanence of anchor institutions creates an environment of stability and genuine investment in the success of the community, but only through close partnership can that investment result in City-wide benefits. Middletown, perhaps more than any other community of its size, has a wealth of highly-committed anchors, led by the City, Wesleyan University, Middlesex Health, Pratt & Whitney, Liberty Bank, and the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce. Linking these institutions closely together in a shared mission of investment and improvement in Middletown can lead to substantial development gains.

Leadership at all of these institutions should make a coordinated investment in the Downtown area, locating jobs and housing that will drive activity and growth in related sectors such as retail and restaurants. A shared interest in amenities such as recreation facilities, trails, boathouses, and cultural centers can result in substantial public-private investments.

The Middletown Entrepreneurial Workspace Plus (MEWS+) initiative has already demonstrated the strong potential of this partnership in fostering start-ups and encouraging young entrepreneurs. While headquartered at the Chamber of Commerce property, the MEWS+ partnership has already successfully incubated businesses that have grown and taken over larger spaces in the Downtown area.

Building on this approach, the Chamber and the City, backed by the other key anchors, should continue to work closely to equally split economic development efforts between recruitment of new business for infill and new development and fostering of growth and expansion among the existing business community. Finally, engaging the creative and vibrant atmosphere of Wesleyan, in particular, is key to continue positioning Middletown as attractive and vibrant.

Match market demands with available commercial development and redevelopment sites. [MAP of industrially and commercially-zoned land]

While Connecticut’s overall business environment has been slower than other states in its economic recovery following the “Great Recession” begun in 2008, development in the City of Middletown has been relatively strong. Input from the City and the Chamber of Commerce has indicated that Middletown has been supply-limited for larger commercial and industrial sites over the last several years. The former Aetna campus off Industrial Park Drive, which in many similar communities in Connecticut would have been an idle burden, was converted to a FedEx distribution facility, which is emblematic of Middletown’s appeal to businesses seeking prime sites. The central location of Middletown, its access to major highways and transportation corridors, its business-friendly reputation, and the prior availability of development land has served it well. The challenge of the next decade in this area is to seek to both maximize the remaining commercially- and industrially-developable land and to minimize the conversion of this land to residential development. The focus on development in specific areas will also have the likely result of relieving development pressure on other, environmentally sensitive property, including portions of the Maromas area that could be preserved as open space and forest land.

Several areas of the City should be focal points for increased development and redevelopment. While it is also a gateway to some of the important natural and environmentally sensitive areas of Middletown, the Saybrook Road (Route 154) corridor, south of Brooks Street and the Summerhill Apartments, holds significant potential for redevelopment. It is currently marked by disconnected and marginal land uses that could be both upgraded to more vibrant and better-connected uses. The Saybrook Road corridor is within the existing/proposed sewer service area nearly to Airport Road. Ensuring that there is both capacity in this system and sufficient water utility provision will help facilitate the expansion of commercial uses along this corridor.

The land between River Road and Silver Street, primarily owned by the State of Connecticut, could be a very important mixed-use redevelopment property that should be master-planned, perhaps in association with a public-private partnership with a highly-qualified developer. The City should be in regular contact with the State about potential future disposition. Similarly, the City should work with property owners of existing and potential development sites along Middle Street in the Westfield section of the City. While there are numerous productive sites along this important commercial corridor, there remain several smaller properties that could be coordinated and, in some places, combined to create attractive destinations for new construction.

Middletown is home to two of the State's fewer than 75 federally-designated Opportunity Zones. These areas, Census Tracts 5416 (Downtown) and 5411 (North End) are eligible to participate in this program that provides capital gains tax relief to encourage investment in development and redevelopment. The City should act quickly and decisively to assist in the establishment of an Opportunity Zone Investment Fund, but should also act as a strong guiding force, both through participation in decision-making and through Zoning Regulation control. There is no benefit to the City to simply chase investment funds without agreeing that the specific type of investment and development project is appropriate for the neighborhood in which it may be proposed.

The focus for new housing development should reflect the desired development patterns.

A few factors are at work that all point to a certain type of housing development: There is a general sentiment that areas for larger-scale commercial and industrial development should not be converted to residential property; Sewer and water lines that would be necessary for higher-density residential development should not be extended much (if at all) beyond existing limits; Infill development and redevelopment is highly desirable in the City's Opportunity Zones, particularly in the North End; Additional housing downtown would increase the attractiveness and stability of new retail and restaurant development, as well as adding vibrancy; and suburban and low-density areas of Middletown should be generally preserved. Where prior PoCD recommendations focused on limiting the population growth of Middletown, with a target of 50,000-55,000 residents, there is now a general sentiment that growth is necessary but requires management. However, controlled housing growth does not mean widespread development in Middletown. The focus of this housing growth should be a blend of higher density market-rate units and affordable units, particularly in the North End, Downtown and Riverfront areas where public infrastructure is available to support it.

The management of this housing growth includes several factors: There should be a focus on public amenities or access to City parks, trails, and resources, and Zoning Regulations should reflect these elements. In other words, Zoning processes and Regulations should be streamlined, but with a focus on good design and a permitted development density reflective of the specific capacity and scale of the targeted neighborhoods; The City, while encouraging housing growth in core areas, should be reluctant to provide public subsidy or tax relief to potential developers. Market demand should provide the majority of the incentive for development projects; Housing development should be mixed-income, and mixed-use where appropriate to encourage re-use of existing buildings. Continued support should be given to existing neighborhoods in lower-density areas with remaining development capacity to ensure that any additional development fits into the community context and be provided with sufficient amenities and safe access to recreational and civic resources.

The Riverfront is the best opportunity to demonstrate a balance between conservation and development.

[Insert images from PPS report – perhaps page 11 or 22]

As pointed out in the 2014 Project for Public Spaces (PPS) report, *“A Placemaking Plan for the Middletown Riverfront,”* the Middletown riverfront is at an important turning point. After decades of industrialization, neglect, and the blockade created by Route 9, the City is rallying around the realization that the Connecticut River is one of the most important resources to the future self-definition of Middletown. The potential realignment of Route 9, the decommissioning of the wastewater treatment plant on River Road, the increased focus on recreational and environmental amenities, and the natural economic appeal and resource of the extraordinary shoreline available to Middletown have converged. The result is the rare and important opportunity to leverage the Riverfront as a turning point. It is critical that the City build upon and coordinate existing and developing plans to affect access to the River and take advantage of this transformational window.

The City must actively ensure that Route 9 realignment plans include a strong and friendly pedestrian connection between the Riverfront and Downtown. The ideal scenario would be a pedestrian overpass, with a high level of on-bridge activity including but not limited to plantings, kiosks, vendors, and public art). A secondary option would be to enhance and expand the existing tunnel to improve the connections to and through with signage, landscaping, lighting, artwork, security, and maintenance. The broad accessibility to bicycle, pedestrian, disabled, and transit-dependent users of the River across Route 9 is critical, as parking availability will be a significant limitation to development.

Beyond the primary connection between Downtown and the Harbor Park area, the City should focus on improving existing access points. Union Street, Walnut Street, Eastern Drive, and River Road itself are all neglected resources, particularly where pedestrian and bicycle access are concerned. As plans for Riverfront development proceed, the City should focus on improving the roadway access, including signage, sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, and other wayfinding enhancements to encourage visitors and residents from different areas to conveniently arrive along the River.

While the PPS report provides an excellent and appropriate template focused on increasing public access and activity at numerous points along the River, the City should seek to engage the

involvement of both its anchor institutions and private developers to create the ultimate plan for the redevelopment of the Riverfront. Opportunities for public/private partnerships, including new boathouses, marinas, shared parking, and public amenities within private development projects, should be prioritized. While the most direct access to and along the river itself should be maintained for the general public, development and redevelopment of near-River areas (including the soon-to-be decommissioned wastewater treatment facility, OMO site, Jackson Corrugated site, and State-owned land southerly of Riverfront Park, should have a strong private investment component. Both refining the final recommendations of the PPS report, including the conversion of some of the public-space recommendations into hard engineering plans, and establishing the policy and regulatory framework to enable private investment are key next steps.

[Insert quote from 1935 parking study sent via email].

Parking Downtown is a management issue, not a supply issue.

In any busy central business district, parking availability is one of the most frequent concerns of the restaurants, retail shops, and other businesses located along Main Street. Downtown Middletown is no exception, and a focus on parking was an oft-repeated theme of the public process for this Plan. Upon investigation, it appears that the perceived dearth of publicly-available parking is not the reality of the situation.

Current parking availability within a short walk of all Downtown destinations is sufficient, but wayfinding and management are not appropriate to alert visitors to proximate parking and present a safe, pleasant walk between parking and destination. Appropriate, well-designed wayfinding signage and enhanced walking pathways will encourage the use of slightly more distant spaces. As activity in the Downtown area increases, there will be a naturally heightened demand for even more parking.

A Downtown circulator trolley would allow for the use of remote parking areas, particularly for full-time employees of Downtown businesses and free up more central parking areas. This trolley could also include stops at Wesleyan, Middlesex Hospital, and the Riverfront to knit together multiple parking- or vehicle-limited areas.

Parking decks, as a compromise between full garages and expanded surface lots, could help add capacity at a more reasonable cost to existing parking areas.

Finally, the next decade will see the first opportunity for autonomous vehicles (AV) to impact how people travel and use long-term parking areas. It is possible, though far from guaranteed, that even as activity grows in the Downtown core, parking demand may decrease because of AV usage will allow shared vehicles to be used instead of parked.

The City, along with Middletown Transit, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Department of Transportation should monitor this growth closely and develop a rational and phased approach to plan for future scenarios.

4. What should we do?

- a. Actively engage the CT DOT and Middletown stakeholders on final designs for **realignment** of Route 9, seeking to improve access to Downtown and the Riverfront, increase the efficiency of travel through Middletown, and minimize displacement and environmental justice concerns while safeguarding pedestrians and bicyclists;
- b. Develop plans for enhancement and maintenance of pedestrian crossing bridge over Route 9 to ensure a high-quality, welcoming experience;
- c. Convene and participate in extensive public engagement and outreach to explain and assist in the implementation of final plans for Route 9 realignment;
- d. Review Zoning Regulations for areas affected (accessed or compromised) by Route 9 realignment to encourage compatible development or redevelopment;
- e. Formalize regular communications between City and key anchor institutions, facilitated through the Chamber of Commerce, to align and coordinate on major goals and investment plans;
- f. Build upon MEWS+ and develop additional templates for public-private partnership for business growth and public resources;
- g. Work with anchor institutions and Downtown Business District to maintain a focus on the promotion of businesses, redevelopment of underutilized properties, and enhancement of public amenities and infrastructure in the Main Street area;
- h. Balance economic development efforts between the recruitment of new businesses and retention/expansion of existing businesses;
- i. Work with Middlesex Health and Pratt & Whitney to encourage the location of complementary health care, wellness, engineering, and technology businesses in Middletown, including expanded housing opportunities for employees;
- j. Develop an in-depth understanding of available properties for development and redevelopment in key commercial/industrial corridors and nodes, including preparation of development prospectus and informational assistance to potential developers and siting professionals;
- k. Review Zoning Regulations in key Business and Industrial areas to ensure a streamlined permitting pathway for appropriate uses and developments;
- l. Review Zoning Regulations to ensure development density, including housing and mixed-use, creates a vibrant level of activity in the downtown core and key nodes, within existing sewer-service areas, and is supportive of Downtown;
- m. Maintain existing extent of public sewer and water infrastructure and continue investments in improvements of these public utilities;
- n. Review Design Standards within Zoning Regulations to ensure development and redevelopment is harmonious with the existing neighborhood context and provides strong connections to public amenities and bicycle/pedestrian resources;
- o. Convene regular schedule of community conversations with neighborhood groups to ensure that public investment and regulatory systems are supportive of maintenance of high-quality residential areas;
- p. Seek appropriate development and redevelopment of property within the City's two Opportunity Zones promote Opportunity Zone Investment Fund as a financing option;

- q. Advance the vision of the PPS Riverfront Placemaking Plan by developing engineering-level drawings for public parks and development of a public-private partnership approach to the redevelopment of the former wastewater pollution control plant;
- r. Enhance, through bicycle/pedestrian improvements and wayfinding, existing access points to the Connecticut River;
- s. Actively partner with developers of historic brownfield properties, seeking assistance for cleanup, regulatory relief, and preservation of key architectural features;
- t. Revise Zoning Regulations to encourage and enable redevelopment of historic industrial properties in the Riverfront area to focus on residential, mixed-use, and public amenities;
- u. Engage in coordinated discussions between City, Middletown Transit, Chamber of Commerce, key employers, and DOT on remote parking and Downtown Circulator Trolley;
- v. Develop a wayfinding and parking pathway signage program to improve access to alternative parking areas in Downtown core

[Note: On all these, “what should we do” sections, find a consistent way to punctuate each action item, with either periods, commas, or semicolons.]

Middletown is HEALTHY

We envision a Middletown that is HEALTHY. The City will focus on policies and practices that ensure its residents enjoy clean air, clean water, safe housing, and pollution-free public and private places. Access to healthy and affordable foods will be enabled by strengthening our community services, retaining the productive capacity of our agricultural sector, and focusing on all aspects of the food system. Ensuring that all residents have the opportunity to be active, seek wellness, and remove obstacles to physical and mental health is a critical mission for the City.

1. Clean air and water
2. Pollution control/management
3. Agriculture and Food System
4. Public health
5. Physical and Mental Wellness
 - Access to a local downtown grocery option (grocery store)
 - Fresh produce locally (regional farmers market)
 - Better connectivity for pedestrians (work with complete streets committee)
 - Maintain air quality
 - Prioritize and maintain water quality
 - Develop a Coginchaug River greenway. (Develop standards for parcels within these areas to protect that waterway?)

1. Where are we?

In recent years, there has been a dramatic shift to encourage the overall wellbeing of residents within Connecticut and the United States. Studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between physical health and mental wellness, so State and local agencies are working to promote healthy and active lifestyles and general mental wellbeing. Residents have expressed the desire to live a healthier lifestyle and multiple components must be cobbled together so residents have the tools necessary to achieve this goal. It is more important now than ever that people in Middletown have access and opportunities to walk, bike, run, swim or hike locally because Middletown has more to offer than simply driving downtown and leaving the vehicle in a parking space. It is also important that everyone should also have access to fresh and local food and be able to enjoy the City's air and water resources without concern.

Since the 2010 Plan was developed, there has been a change in what people expect when they become members of a community. More and more, residents are seeking housing that allows for direct access to public amenities and the opportunity to leave their vehicles at home so they may walk or bike to their destination. This specifically presents a challenge as safe and complete access from residential areas to commercial nodes is not in place City-wide.

The Downtown core is considered the most pedestrian-friendly area within the City, but there is much work to be done to move the focus from automobiles to pedestrians. While significant improvements have been made to intersections and pedestrian "bump-outs," large sections of Main Street still include four travel lanes and two sets of angled parking stalls resulting in a road

width in excess of 80 feet. The outcome is a Main Street where either side of the street is not integrated with the other. These qualities reflect historic planning trends in response to the demand that the automobile be prioritized. For many years, across Connecticut, the land use regulatory process focused on curb cuts, parking counts, road widths, drive-throughs, and getting vehicles from point “A” to point “B” as fast as possible. While many of those components are still important when considering new development projects, the cumulative results of this focus are developments where pedestrian access and amenities, if they exist at all, feel like an afterthought. Bicycle racks behind buildings, benches that face the roadway and sidewalks to nowhere all contribute to an environment that has marginalized non-motorized users.

Currently, access to healthy food is also a barrier for many Middletown residents who seek a healthier lifestyle. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food security as having direct access to safe and nutritious foods. According to the 2016 Middlesex Health Community Needs Assessment, almost 8,000 residents in Middletown struggle with food security. This problem has many pieces. It is partly a function of transportation, and the ability to move from place to place safely. It is also a matter of proximity to a grocery store with a variety of healthy food options.

Nationwide there has been a cultural shift with more people demanding to be engaged in some way with the food they eat. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) along with the “Connecticut Grown” Program has become immensely popular Statewide as they provide the opportunity for people to form a connection with their food and its source. The demand for fresh and local produce will only increase in the coming years as the costs and uncertainty related to food imported from other areas increases.

As the City continues to develop over the next ten years, it is increasingly important that air and water quality preservation, necessary green spaces, and Middletown’s goal to maintain a healthy physical environment is considered with each site development proposal.

2. What are people saying?

The visioning process revealed a desire for future activities encouraging a more healthy and complete lifestyle be planned at a more comprehensive level.

Many of the comments made throughout the process tie back to a desire to have more local produce available directly from farmers if possible. There was a consensus among those participating in both the listening sessions and the community charrettes that Middletown should work to turn portions of the City’s existing parks into community gardens or small plot farming areas. The benefits cited for this activity during these sessions included fostering a sense of community, providing free access to fresh produce, economic development and reduced responsibilities on the municipal agencies that currently must maintain these areas. Many participants prioritized Middletown becoming the host of a regional farmers market given that it already serves as a regional hub. A weekly farmers market downtown would also help diversify the availability of fresh produce and groceries, specifically within the downtown area. Residents felt that in some cases, lack of complete and safe pedestrian connections to large

grocery stores made access to healthier food options a barrier to those without personal transportation.

Furthermore, pedestrian access was also identified as something that should become a much larger component of development activities. Residents identified that it has become increasingly the case that patrons are walking or riding bikes to restaurants, City parks, and other Downtown amenities. In spite of this, some sections of Main Street that have been delineated for pedestrians are not enjoyable and don't foster the interactions that residents desire. As such, accommodations for all users and areas designed specifically for bicycles and pedestrians were of priority throughout the public input process. It was clear to residents that these types of improvements should be thoughtful and forward-looking, not simply included when space and/or budget permits.

Pedestrian access, specifically along the Riverfront was also of focus for many residents. It's a reoccurring sentiment that many residents feel that Middletown's frontage along the Connecticut River is underutilized, and many people believe that the River could be used to help foster, among other things, a healthier and more active lifestyle. Those who work in proximity to the River expressed a desire to walk during lunch or after work. Other residents felt that a bike trail currently planned elsewhere in Town could be moved to be routed along a portion of the River. Regardless of the specific function of the River, it was clear that pedestrian access for outdoor recreation in some form was unanimously important.

Be it for the Connecticut River or other water resources, preserving water quality was unquestionably important. Respondents felt many things should be done to achieve this including establishing River area greenway corridors, working to limit the discharge of runoff into area streams and rivers and promoting "no-mow" areas, especially along roads without curbing to help filter roadway runoff. These efforts, however small, were seen as necessary and important when it comes to Middletown doing its part to protect the resources within the City's limits.

Air quality was also of concern for many residents. Even with vast improvements over the last ten years in reduced emissions and green energy solutions this area is still only considered to be a "moderate" ozone non-attainment area by the EPA. Residents reflected on the fact that the 2010 Plan did have a section related to air quality but some of the recommendations were very specific and not within the purview of the Planning and Zoning process so little progress was made to implement its recommendations. It was suggested that perhaps moving forward developments could be analyzed for their contribution to improving or degrading the air quality, and overall environmental impact.

Finally, a comment that was made with the overall goal of improving the health of the residents of Middletown outlined the need for improved housing stock, especially in the North end of the City. Many of the housing units in that area are old, and in disrepair or potentially unsafe. According to the State's 2014 Health Assessment, there is a strong correlation between housing that was built before 1960 and the likelihood its inhabitants will be subject to lead paint exposure. As of 2014, Middletown had between 4,000 and 9,000 dwellings units built before 1960.

Additional housing units was a topic that came up throughout many of the public input sessions. Some residents felt that additional housing units within proximity to Main Street would help drive demand and increase business retention. These units would help to create a more stable population of customers within the Downtown core. Included in those units should be a healthier, more affordable option than some of the housing stock that exists today, particularly North of Downtown. It is important that all residents of Middletown have access to safe and healthy housing.

3. What are the big ideas?

A healthy city provides physical and social resources for its residents.

Middletown is the City that it is today because of its vibrant and growing commercial sectors and because of the people who live there. The City should focus on and prioritize improvements to make Middletown healthier for its residents. Most importantly, prioritizing access for all non-motorized users throughout Middletown will be key in maintaining the City's commercial corridors. Through the development of a more complete pedestrian network, residents will have the opportunity to walk or bike to the places they wish to go rather than being forced to take a car or bus. This alone will help reduce emissions and traffic congestion while allowing residents to live healthier lifestyles. Development proposals should be evaluated for both access by non-motorized users and access by vehicles. Additional design and engineering oversight will be required; however, the long-term benefit will be well worth it as in many cases a City does not see redevelopment of a site for multiple decades.

Middletown can continue to be a regional center for high-quality food.

Middletown is already known regionally as a place with a wide variety of dining options. On Main Street alone there are dozens of restaurants offering high-quality, healthy meals. However, more can be done to assure residents can gain access to fresh, high-quality produce without having to go to a restaurant to get it. While the land directly adjacent to the Connecticut River contains immensely fertile soil, Middletown's developed nature doesn't provide much opportunity for large scale farming. However, one of Middletown's assets is that it currently serves as a regional hub for many of the lower Connecticut River Valley's activities. One activity that would drive economic vitality, promote regional agriculture, and greatly improve the availability of fresh local produce would be for Middletown to become the host of a regional farmers' market. Due to the high costs related to growing and ultimately delivering fresh produce to buyers, farmers are eager to make fresh produce available in locations where they know it will sell. If the City were to work with Portland, Middlefield, Durham, and Haddam or other area Towns to develop connections with local producers the City could host a farmers' market that would rival some of the largest already operating in Connecticut.

To further contribute to the accessibility of fresh and local produce, the City can also promote a community and small plot farming program. Some residents of Middletown do not have housing with available land for a small garden. Furthermore, there are areas within the City's existing parks that are underutilized and could be transformed into small community or neighborhood gardens. Many Towns in Connecticut have successfully developed these programs and they have served to help foster the participants' sense of community while making fresh, local and low

cost produce available nearby. Since many of Middletown's housing units do not include access to an area suitable for a garden, those residents would be well served to have access to this type of resource.

Clean air and water are priorities.

While the entire State including Middletown is not in a position of being short on the availability of water there is certainly a lot more the City can do to be sure it's working toward maintaining and promoting improved water quality within the area's rivers and streams. This can be achieved with best practices in stormwater management. All runoff generated by impervious surfaces during a rain event if handled traditionally will eventually make its way into a small stream or river which will ultimately feed into the Connecticut River. The concern associated with this practice is that any pollutants that are picked up by that stormwater will eventually be transferred directly into the environment through the river. Furthermore, if specific site activities result in pollutants being deposited onto the ground the pollution to those areas resources will only be magnified. Luckily, the land use process can manage this. Through the development of protected greenways, the adoption and enforcement of Low Impact Development standards that specifically require the water to be renovated in some way before being released on-site back into the ground will ensure that the City can do its part to help with this issue.

Each site development brings an opportunity to make a positive impact on the environment. While small scale residential projects don't necessarily produce as many emissions as large commercial or industrial operations there is still an opportunity for these projects to contribute to Middletown's goal of making marked improvements to the local air and water quality. Land use approvals and regulations should reflect the importance of making sure land uses immediately adjacent to natural resources are compatible.

A healthy lifestyle starts at home.

There is a large population of Middletown residents living in old housing units that are in disrepair and potentially unsafe. There is a strong correlation, especially with young children (data to be added here) between the age and quality of the housing stock and the physical health of the inhabitant. Improving the quality of the housing stock in targeted areas will not only help to stimulate growth and investment, but it will also increase the overall physical wellbeing of those residents currently residing in inadequate conditions. Through targeted redevelopment efforts the City can work with the property owners in this area to improve the living conditions of the dwelling units while also creating a more economically viable solution for owners.

The City, in this plan, must encourage the improvement of housing units, particularly those built prior to 1960, prioritize the preservation of water and air quality, promote access to fresh and local produce, facilitate increased pedestrian amenities and strive to ensure that no cohort of the Cities residents are underserved in these areas with the goal of ensuring that the physical environment of Middletown and those who live in it are healthy.

4. What should we do?

- a. Adjust the regulatory process so that site developments are required to be designed to accommodate all users including bicycles, pedestrians, and travelers via bus and car.
- b. Work with the Complete Streets Committee to prioritize key pedestrian connections that can be made to promote walkability.
- c. Work with the Commission on Conservation and Agriculture to start conversations with nearby Towns who might have local producers interested in participating in a regional farmers market.
- d. Consider the development of a Coginchaug River Greenway for official State designation.
- e. Work with the City's Health Department and Middlesex Hospital to evaluate the benefits to creating a "Healthy City" Initiative.
- f. Adopt the State Department of Health's "Health in all policies" approach to land use regulations to allow current and future Middletown residents the ability to live a healthy and active lifestyle.
- g. Expand upon the City's bicycle network by developing a standard procedure of including bike lanes any time a road is paved, reconstructed or re-stripped-provided road widths will support it.
- h. Work with the Commission on Conservation and Agriculture and City's Parks and Recreation Department to determine the availability and overall feasibility of creating multiple community gardens, particularly in lower-income and lower access areas.
- i. Incorporate into the zoning regulations that all new and substantially redeveloped commercial property apply best practices in stormwater management.
- j. Work with the City's Economic Development staff to promote and attract grocery stores and other opportunities to bring fresh produce to Middletown's downtown core.
- k. Evaluate land use applications proposed near natural resources for overall compatibility and risk.
- l. Leverage proximity to downtown to promote and encourage the redevelopment of properties in unsafe conditions and other low-quality housing stock, particularly in the Downtown area.

Middletown is CONNECTED

1. Where are we?

The very name “Middletown” is imbued with a sense of connection. A community at the very center and crossroads of Connecticut embodies the opportunity and responsibility to link together different places, cultures, and experiences. From I-91 to the Connecticut River, from Downtown to Rockfall, Middletown’s networking resources are extensive. These connections are both physical – roads, power lines – and social. Living up to its name, the City must continually focus on improving these networks and strengthening its connections within and beyond the municipal line.

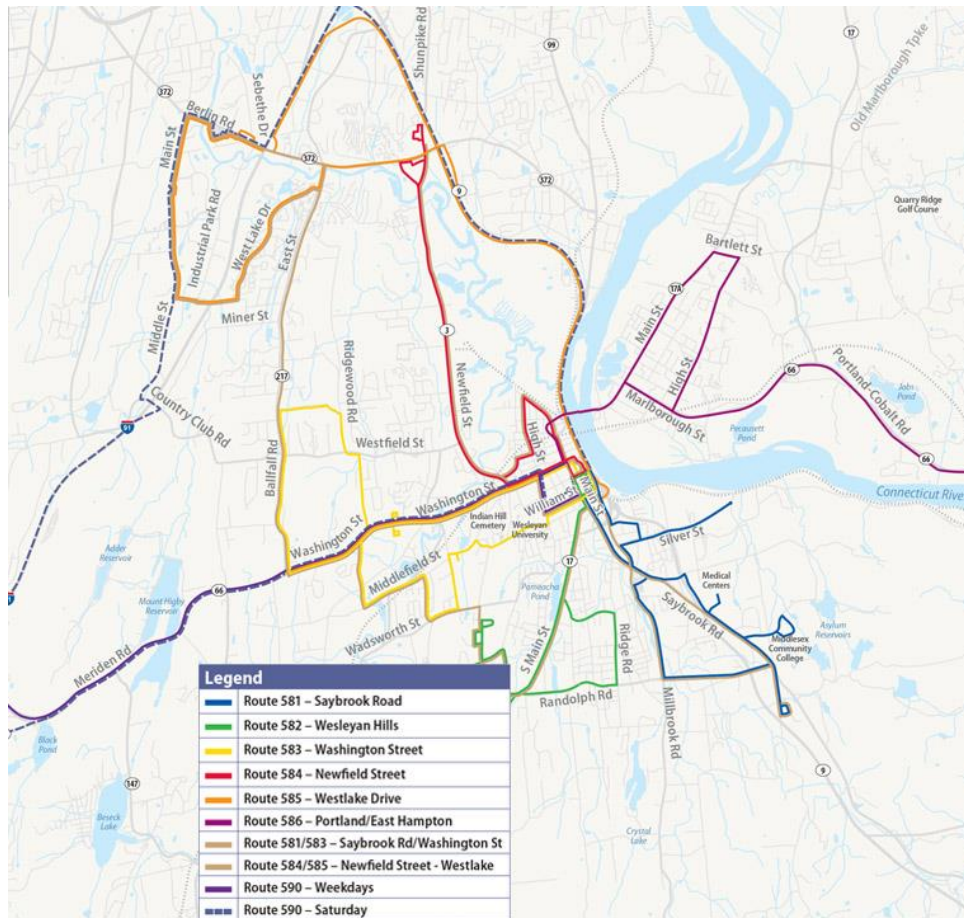
From a transportation network standpoint, Middletown is served by two major arterial roads – Interstate 91, with one interchange (Country Club Road) in Middletown, and Route 9, a major limited-access highway along the Connecticut River with seven exits to Middletown. The City is also served by several major State highways, including Routes 66, 154, 17, 3, and 157, Connecting Middletown to adjacent communities.

Vehicle trips on these state or interstate roads vary widely, with Route 154 coming up from Haddam receiving less than 10,000 trips per day, on average, to well over 100,000 vehicles per day traveling through Middletown on Interstate 91. Traffic on all of the major Middletown roads has increased over the past decade, according to Connecticut DOT traffic counts.

Most Recent Tracking Year	State/Interstate Route	Annual Average Daily Trips	AADT from 2008-2012	Percentage Change
2015	Route 9	35,000 – 70,000	31,100 – 66,800	+ 7.2%
2016	Route 66	14,400 – 37,000	13,800 – 31,500	+ 13.4%
2015	Route 154	9,100 – 9,900	8,100 – 9,600	+ 7.3%
2015	Interstate 91	111,300 – 115,700	110,000 – 113,900	+ 1.4%

Source: Connecticut DOT Traffic Counts

Middletown Area Transit (MAT) is the primary provider of transit services in northern Middlesex County and within the City of Middletown. MAT is a quasi-municipal agency funded by the Federal Transportation Administration, the Connecticut Department of Transportation, and the City of Middletown, which provides a fixed route, ADA Dial-A-Ride and Rural Transportation serving Middletown, Middlefield, East Hampton, Portland, Durham and parts of Cromwell and Meriden. MAT provides direct service to AMTRAK and the Westfield Shopping Mall in Meriden. Connections are available to Higganum, Chester, Essex, and Old Saybrook via 9 Town Transit. In addition, connections are available to Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, Hartford, and New Haven via CT Transit.



(2019 Bus Route Map from MAT - <https://www.middletownareatransit.org/index.php>)

The general agreement among stakeholders is that, while MAT is a good and responsive service provider, additional investment should be made to increase the flexibility of service, add a dedicated downtown circulator trolley, and upgrade stations, stops, and multi-modal connections.

The 2010 Plan of Conservation & Development did not address the status, connectivity, or function of the City's transportation network comprehensively. Many of the recommendations in the 2010 Plan touched on transportation including basic maintenance of road systems, enforcement of traffic laws, encouragement of transit and non-motorized travel as a means to reduce air pollution, and calming traffic. All of these elements are still valid, and the recommendations in that Plan should be implemented though in an adapted format.

A holistic approach should be taken over the next decade to unify the City's policies and priorities surrounding community connectivity.

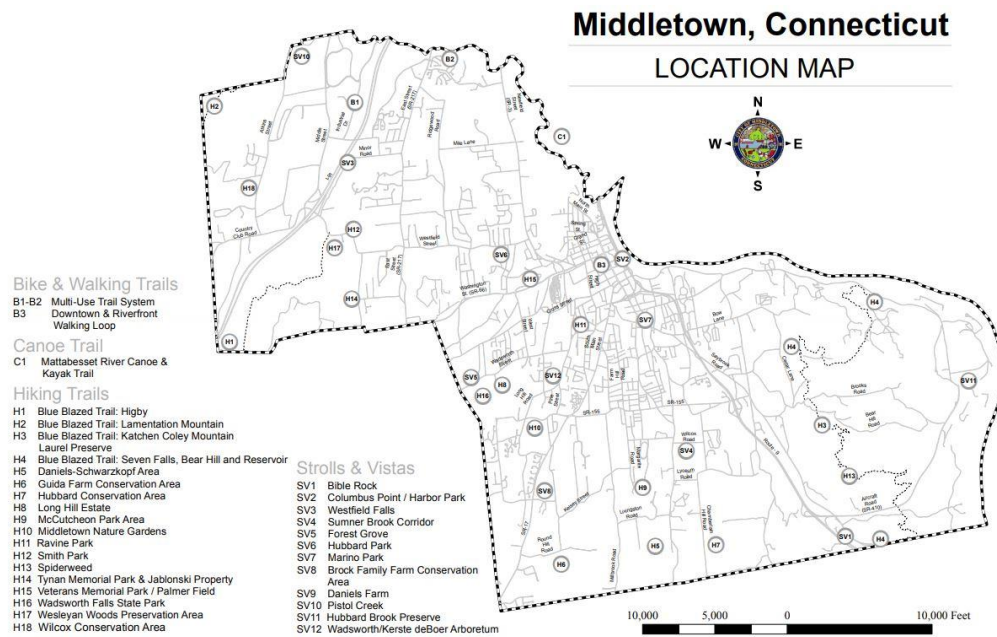
A Complete Streets Master Plan was developed for Middletown in 2013 by the Complete Streets Committee, with a mission of "encouraging biking, walking, and transit on Middletown streets...The Committee will work to facilitate walking and biking connections between neighborhoods, commercial districts, parks, public lands, private institutions, and neighboring communities." The overall vision of this effort reflects well the vision of the Middletown Plan of

Conservation & Development, specifically that, “Transportation improvements in Middletown will be designed and constructed according to Complete Streets guidelines to encourage safe driving, walking, bicycling, and transit for all users.” [Note: Maybe call out as a highlighted quote]. The final Master Plan should be adopted by the Common Council, along with the adoption of the overall Plan of Conservation & Development document. The Committee’s work is ongoing, and specific priority projects are continually identified and pre-ranked, depending on changing conditions and funding. A close on-going relationship between this Committee, the Planning & Zoning Commission, Public Works, and the Common Council is a critical one.

Beyond the road and transportation system, the City is linked through other key infrastructure networks. The City’s Sewer and Water Department provides public utilities to a majority of residents and businesses with clean water, sanitary waste disposal, and opportunity for growth within designated boundaries. The Department has been undergoing a long process of improvement and system upgrade, culminating with a recent inter-connection to the Mattabassett Water Pollution Control facility near the Middletown/Cromwell line, which will allow the shut-down and redevelopment of the former River Road plant. As part of its overall growth management strategy, the City and its Sewer & Water Department have no plans to expand the current limits of the sewer service area. As a result, growth and development outside this area will be limited to relatively low water-use and lower density projects.

Other key utilities, including power, natural gas, cable, and high-speed data lines serve the City, provided by various private and publicly-regulated companies. Providing high-quality, reliable service to as many residents and businesses as possible remains the primary priority for these utility companies. When utilities are delivered via overhead lines, storm-related outages are to be minimized with regular coordination with the City and State to ensure that trees and other potential hazards are mitigated. Future upgrades to utility systems, particularly in the case of high-speed data networks, will also need to be closely monitored. Infrastructure for wireless (wi-fi) networks and future 5G data may require the installation of numerous structures on both private properties and within the public right-of-way. The improved technology holds the promise of connecting the community ever more closely and providing better access to information for all residents. Balancing of these technological advances with the existing fabric of the community, however, will present important challenges.

Connecting the elements of the built environment is half of the geographic connectivity puzzle. The other half is uniting Middletown’s natural environment with linkages between its parks, open spaces, farms, wildlife corridors, and rivers. Middletown has numerous green and natural spaces with the most prominent spaces along the Connecticut River. The State, Land Trusts, and other private and nonprofit entities control many other properties that contribute to the City’s natural environment. The Recreation & Community Services Department published a Trails Guide in 2016 that does an excellent job of documenting and detailing publicly-accessible lands throughout the City. The challenge for the next decade is to identify opportunities to grow the connection between these trails and parks with linkages and ensure that all residents have access to nature and recreational resources.



[2016 Middletown Trails Guide - maybe rotate and enlarge as a full-page map]

*****There are also very good photos in the Trails Guide (in project folder) *****

Beyond the City's physical infrastructure and natural environment, the importance of "connectivity" is critical to many other aspects of the next decade of life in Middletown. The City represents one of the most diverse cross-sections of residents in Connecticut, both geographically across its neighborhoods and culturally. This diversity brings both vibrancies to the community as well as challenges for the municipal and civic leaders of the City. Access to civic, public health, recreational, educational, decision-making, mobility, employment, economic, and personal wellness information and opportunities must reach all residents.

The gap in civic participation cuts across cultural, economic, racial, and gender lines, and the City must seek to involve and connect all groups. Certainly, each resident must decide for themselves whether to take advantage of the information and opportunities provided and as a result, total equality of representation and participation is not guaranteed. Each resident must be given equal access to the information, and in this way may the City increase its civic and cultural connectivity. The tools for this outreach are better than they have ever been: From technology such as social media, municipal and civic websites, email distribution to the grass-roots neighborhood and community outreach and public meetings. Coordination with nonprofit, non-governmental, and religiously-affiliated groups is also critical to communicate with all residents. The value of an increasingly connected community is reflected in a more engaged public that shares in the ownership of the City's future.

2. What are people saying?

[Insert word cloud from survey]

A dedicated coalition of Middletown citizens has recently completed a Complete Streets Master Plan (2019). A great deal of the public input received about the PoCD involved ensuring the road and trail network in Middletown was maximally connected, both geographically and socially. Several principles were generally agreed upon in this public input: Middletown's street network is not currently safe enough for non-vehicular transportation options, particularly bicycle and pedestrian; Connecting residential neighborhoods to each other, and to the core commercial and civic centers, via all modes of travel is a major priority; Not all roads are equally suited for multi-modal upgrades, particularly bicycle travel, and thus a variety of engineering solutions will be needed; Greenways and trails should be used to connect open spaces and create non-motorized linkages within Middletown and to neighboring communities; The transit system should be emphasized and made more flexible; Maintenance of existing systems, including traffic control, pedestrian crossings, sidewalks, and trails, should be prioritized; and Connections to the Riverfront, particularly across Route 9, is a central and shared goal.

A Sustainability initiative undertaken by several Wesleyan students reviewed several systems as part of their contribution to planning for the PoCD update. The group that reviewed Middletown's transit system included several key recommendations, including [Note: maybe put these in a separate box or differentiated font?]

- The Planning and Zoning Code must be amended by 2022, for example, to require new developments to incorporate a standard suite of actions that address alternative transportation needs, including but not limited to: safe road crossings for pedestrians and bikes, sidewalks, bike racks, and bus stop shelters. (Adopted from the 2010 POCD)
- By 2022, Middletown Area Transit must install bus trackers on all busses and create a method for riders to view bus locations, either through a mobile app or website.
- Studies must be conducted, and recommendations from such studies gradually phased in on the current efficiency of the MAT route system. If any recommendations are made to change the current routes in any form, plans must be developed to transition the route systems proposed.
- Incentives must be introduced to encourage Middletown residents to use alternative modes of transportation, aiding in the ease of traffic congestion and offsetting carbon emissions from passenger vehicles.

Specific improvements to the City's transit system were also highlighted in much of the public's input. These suggestions included: incorporating more smaller buses and electric vehicles to reduce the system's carbon footprint and allow for flexibility of smaller and circulator routes; increasing "on-demand" options; constructing or upgrading existing shelters, improving signage for routes and stops; increasing on-line networking and communications on routes and transit availability; and working to collaborate on connections between other regional and inter-regional transit networks outside of Middletown. A downtown circulator trolley also received several mentions, and much interest from transit users, employees of major businesses, and representatives of the Chamber of Commerce.

The Middletown Clean Energy Task Force, as part of their 2019 Energy Plan for the City, recommended an increased focus on the development of “microgrids,” which would increase the resiliency and connectedness of the City’s power grid. These systems, which could initially be focused around the Downtown area as well as key municipal assets such as the High School, would have the benefits of increasing power reliability, cost savings, flexibility for local users, and the potential to ramp up renewable energy usage.

3. What are the big ideas?

The transportation network should work for everyone.

The core of the City’s connectivity lies in its basic transportation infrastructure. The network of highways, local roads, sidewalks, trails, and paths tie the City physically together and should facilitate an easy, convenient, and safe connection within and beyond Middletown. Beginning with a baseline of proper road maintenance, the City’s focus should be on continual improvement to ensure that this transportation network meets the needs of its residents, businesses, and visitors.

Both the Complete Streets efforts and general public sentiment are strongly focused on encouraging the sharing of the public way with all modes of transportation, particularly the non-motorized modes of bicycle and pedestrian travel. In the short term, increasing the opportunity and presence of bicycles and pedestrians means that drivers will need to increase awareness and sensitivity to others sharing the travel network. The City should actively work to publicize road-sharing through signage, road treatments, and public information campaigns to reduce distracted driving and improve the visibility and safety of bicyclists and pedestrians. Similarly, bicyclists should be strongly encouraged to wear proper safety and visibility equipment and follow the vehicular rules of the road. Recognizing that not all roadways can accommodate proper, dedicated bicycle lanes, a variety of road treatments and solutions will be needed to provide for increased safety. In the case of sidewalks, priority should be given to expanding the network to connect existing neighborhoods, providing for ADA-compliant curbs, crosswalks, and travel widths, and to ensure that regulations are in place that requires new developments to properly facilitate pedestrian connections to the established network.

State highways, multi-use trails, and transit systems should function to serve the goals of efficiency, safety, and equity on an inter-municipal scale. Flexible, responsive transit systems will accommodate the local population without access to private transportation as well as improving connections to larger, regional transit networks in Hartford, New Haven, and beyond.

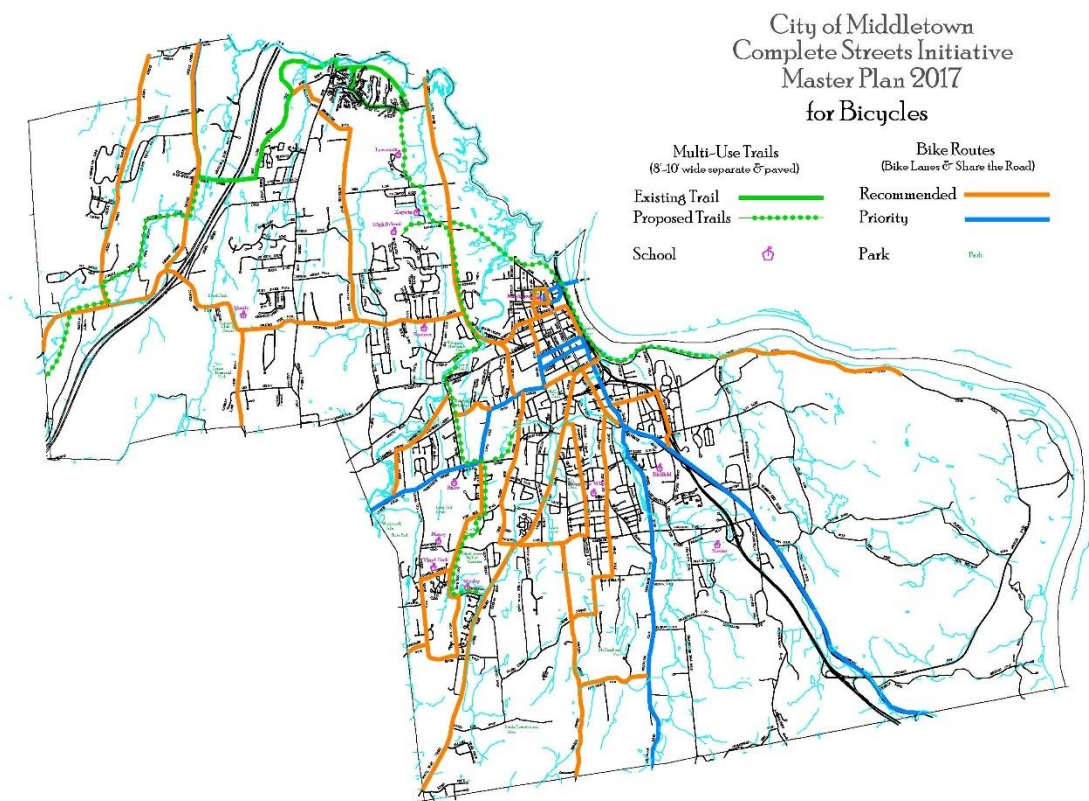
Complete Streets Master Plan should be an implementation priority.

For the last several years, the Complete Streets Committee has worked to develop a framework for improving Middletown’s infrastructure to accommodate and welcome all modes of transportation safely and conveniently. The initial result of this work was the 2013 Complete Streets Master Plan, which is still being updated and augmented to respond to changing needs and priorities.

[Separate box with broad goals from 2013 CSMP listed]

- Provide safe and comfortable routes for walking, bicycling, and public transportation to increase the use of these modes of transportation, enable convenient and active travel as part of daily activities, reduce pollution, and meet the needs of all users of the street, including children, families, older adults, and people with disabilities.
- Ensure that land-use patterns and decisions encourage walking, bicycling, and public transportation use, and make these transportation options a safe and convenient choice.
- Increase children's physical activity to benefit their short- and long-term health and improve their ability to learn.
- Increase the use of parks and open space for physical activity and encourage residents to access parks by walking, bicycling, or public transportation.

In addition to adopting and ratifying the work of the Complete Streets Master Plan by both the Common Council and the Planning & Zoning Commission (as a formal appendix to the Plan of Conservation & Development), the City should continue to support the work of the Complete Streets Committee as a key stakeholder in identifying and prioritizing improvements on an ongoing basis.



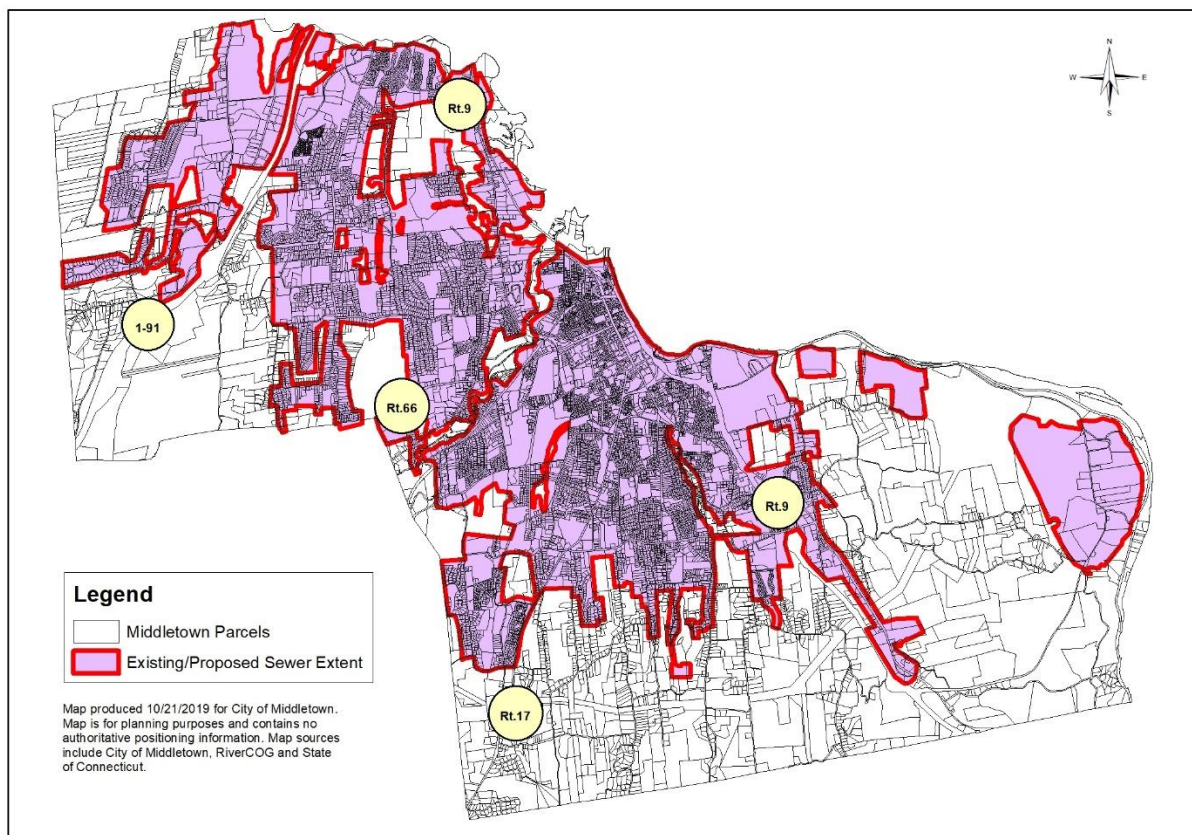
Infrastructure should be enhanced, not expanded.

One of the formal responsibilities of a Plan of Conservation & Development, per Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-23, is that "Any municipal plan of conservation and development

scheduled for adoption on or after July 1, 2015, shall identify the general location and extent of any (1) areas served by existing sewerage systems, (2) areas where sewerage systems are planned, and (3) areas where sewers are to be avoided.” The existence and extent of public sewer systems, and to a similar extent, public water systems, is both a public health service and a growth-management approach. The overall goal of this Plan is to encourage development and intensification of activity within existing infrastructure extent, and not to unnecessarily expand it and encourage growth in outlying areas. For this reason, the general extent of the City’s existing sewer service areas represents a declaration of policy of both current and future service.

[Note: rotate this as a single page. It probably doesn’t need to be a fold-out.]

City of Middletown Plan of Conservation & Development 2020: Existing/Proposed Sewer Service Areas



Significant investments have been made in the existing sewer and water infrastructure, including the interconnection with the Mattabesset water pollution control facility and the shuttering of the River Road facility. These investments and upgrades should continue to focus on the existing geographic service extent, increasing this internal capacity to facilitate a concentrated growth and intensification of activity in the City’s core.

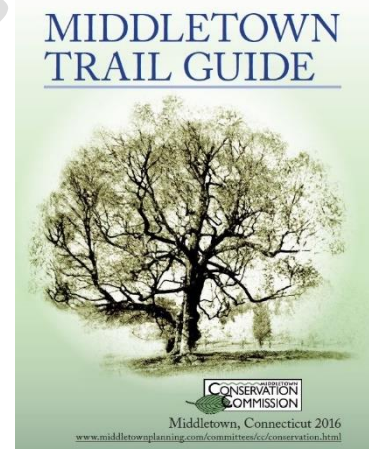
Other components of the City’s utility infrastructure should similarly seek to make continual improvements in connecting the City’s residents, government services, and businesses without unnecessarily expanding their service area., The City’s resilience and connectivity can be

improved with renewable-energy micro-grids, established within the limits of existing facilities such as schools, municipal buildings, Middlesex Hospital. Solar panels installed on the City's many larger commercial and industrial buildings, rather than upon remote farm or forest land can have a similar effect. Telecommunications systems, including telephone, cable, and internet infrastructure should be buried where possible or should use existing facilities where possible for maintenance and improvements. Telecommunication systems should be buried for new developments and major upgrades and should be limited to the greatest extent when rolling out new technologies.

Wi-fi and 5G wireless infrastructure, in particular, holds the promise of dramatically increasing the public's access to information and communications capacity. While this connectivity will be tremendously useful to Middletown, the nature and extent of the required additional physical infrastructure for these systems are yet undetermined. The City should work closely with state regulators to ensure that new telecommunications infrastructure is designed and sited to minimize the impact on the existing physical and cultural community fabric.

Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces should knit the City together

The City of Middletown is fortunate to have a wide variety of City, State, private, Land Trust, and institutional open spaces and parks that are open to the public. There are dozens of opportunities for a variety of active and passive recreation, most notably Wadsworth Falls and Seven Falls State Parks along with the City limits to Harbor Park, the broad swaths of forest land in the Maromas, and popular City parks and playing fields. In addition to seeking the acquisition and permanent protection (via easement) of new conservation lands and active stewardship of existing properties, the City should prioritize the linkage of parks and open spaces in a "green network." The Planning, Parks & Recreation, and Public Works Departments should collaborate with the State of Connecticut, Middlesex Land Trust, Wesleyan, the Conservation Commission, and other key property owners to map out pathways and off-road connections between green spaces. These connections should be easy to navigate via websites, on-street wayfinding, and shared promotion. The Middletown Conservation Commission's excellent 2016 Middletown Trail Guide may be used as a basis of information and starting point, and the City should be both strategic and opportunistic in developing these connections.



Downtown and the Riverfront should be seamless

The history of Middletown is inextricably linked to its crucial connection to the Connecticut River. From early colonial days through the steam-powered industrial revolution of river travel and commerce, Middletown grew and prospered in many ways thanks to the River. As other means of transportation and other industries grew, the City slowly lost its tight links to the waterfront. As far back as the 1940s, the City's Harbor Improvement Agency has sought to restore public access and usage of the riverfront, particularly for recreational purposes. This

Agency developed plans over the next several decades, and in their 1974 Plan for Waterfront Recreational Development stated:

“The revitalization to the Connecticut River waterfront in Middletown would provide an opportunity for the City to re-establish its close relationship with the River which has been badly neglected in recent years. The time is right since Federal and State environmental legislation have resulted in the vast improvement of water quality, and thus the appeal of the River as a recreational resource.”

Just as it has for the past 75 years, the City is still focused on the opportunities before it to connect with the River. While it is not environmental regulations that present a near-term impetus for this revitalization, the next several years present a new critical opportunity.

The proposed reconfiguration of Route 9 will dramatically impact how the City, particularly from the Downtown core, can access and enjoy the resource of the River. Plans for this connection stretch back decades and have included elements like massive “Downtown Decks” (see image) that reshape blocks of property to more modest tunnels, which have been installed.

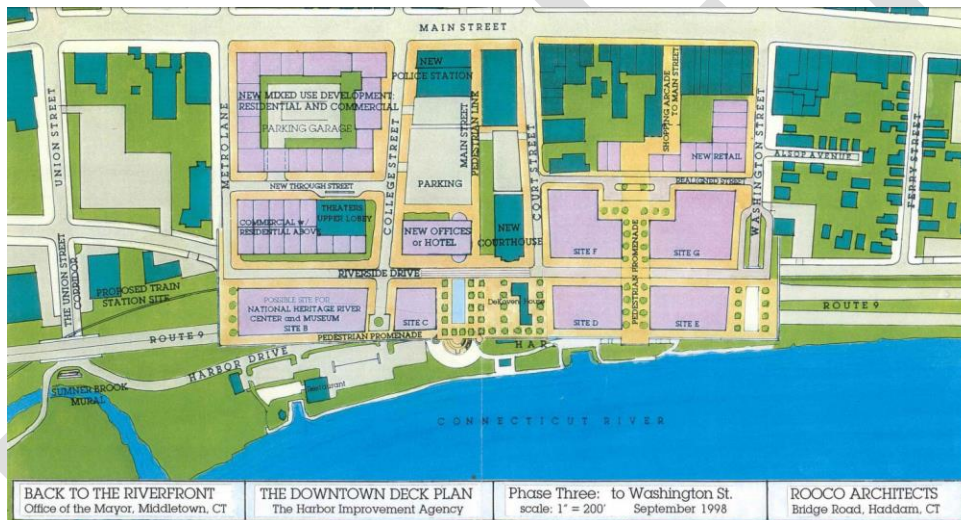


Photo: Concept of proposed “Downtown Deck” crossing Route 9 and connecting Downtown to Riverfront, 1998

Middletown as a community was established and has grown where it is because of the proximity to the particular benefits provided by this location on the Connecticut River, and the City’s existence is predicated on the River. While a strong connection to the water may have been for economic reasons in the past, the opportunity to reconnect and restore a centuries-old relationship with the use and appreciation of the Connecticut River is ever-present. A reconnection will provide, economic and recreational benefits and overall increase the quality of life for Middletown town residents.

As noted, the presence of Route 9, as configured, constructed, and controlled by the State of Connecticut is the single-most significant barrier to this reconnection. Several different options for physically and metaphorically bridging this barrier have been presented over the decades,

each with varying costs and benefits to the community. Any solution will not only need to satisfy a majority of the community decision-makers in Middletown but will ultimately also have to be approved (and largely funded) by the State. The City should think and act boldly to deliver upon the dreams of many decades and knit itself closely to its most special natural resource.

All Available Resources should be marshaled to Foster Neighborhood Cooperation and Communication.

Middletown is often celebrated as one of the most vibrant and diverse communities in Connecticut. This diversity is a major strength of the City, but it presents challenges. Extra efforts must be made to ensure that all voices are heard and respected. While public involvement in Middletown has been more diverse than in most communities, and the City and its institutions do make efforts to be inclusive, increased communication and participation are needed across all demographic and socio-economic groups.

Middletown will thrive as a community when it is closely connected and fully represented. To achieve this, the City must perform the following to inform and involve the entire populace: Expand information networks, through traditional media, social media, email distribution, the City website, meeting broadcasts and live streams to share all key decision processes; tap into traditional networks of religious and cultural institutions, schools, social groups, and associations to help distribute information and encourage civic participation; establishing and formally connecting with dedicated street and neighborhood associations will help the City keep a close link to the grassroots needs, interests, ideas, and priorities; and civic and political groups must redouble efforts to include and promote representatives from the full cross-section of culture and life in Middletown.

4. What should we do?

- a. Conduct an accessibility audit and make ADA improvements at all public facilities;
- b. Implement a citizen reporting system for municipal issues (such as SeeClickFix);
- c. Assign city staff to support/participate in neighborhood group meetings;
- d. Prioritize stewardship of open space and parks over-expansion;
- e. Work with key partners (State of Connecticut, Middlesex Land Trust, etc.) to identify potential links between and among parks and open lands;
- f. Include project tracking and photo-documentation of public works projects for sharing;
- g. Establish a formal relationship and charge to work with the Complete Streets Committee to regularly prioritize short-term issues and bicycle/pedestrian improvements;
- h. Develop a Complete Streets design manual for adoption by City and as a requirement for developers;
- i. Review on-street parking allowance in residential areas (i.e. alternate side parking) to improve public safety;
- j. Work with State of Connecticut and Middletown Area Transit on improved connections to area transit networks;
- k. Continue to upgrade bus stops and other transit shelters;
- l. Prioritize key bicycle path improvements, including River Road/Airport Road, Route 154 Saybrook Road, and Portland/Cheshire Pathway;

- m. Provide priority status to Safe Routes to School improvements for students to bicycle and walk to school;
- n. Maintain active awareness of Connecticut statutes and PURA regulations regarding 5G infrastructure needs and siting;
- o. Pursue redevelopment of Riverfront area and advocacy of Route 9 modifications in a way that maximizes public access to River and connection with Downtown area;
- p. Prioritize upgrades to existing public sewer/water network over the expansion of current extents;
- q. Pursue the development of renewable energy micro-grids surrounding key municipal and institutional assets;
- r. Expand municipal public information efforts and channels of communication, taking advantage of new media and techniques to include all residents.

Middletown is Vibrant

We envision a Middletown that is VIBRANT. Our City will be a treasured home for our current and future residents and a beacon of culture, resources, and activity that draws visitors from around the State and region. Through partnerships between the City, residents, anchor institutions, and private businesses, our parks, schools, libraries, cultural institutions, and community facilities will be accessible, welcoming, inclusive, and responsive to the community's needs. Our government and community will join to partner with our business leaders to maintain a friendly and lively Main Street and Riverfront while working to expand important extensions to neighborhood commercial areas.

1. Where are we?

The City of Middletown has long been considered the “place to be,” among the neighboring Towns of Middlesex County. The idea that Middletown provides such a regional draw from the surrounding area extends beyond the fact that it has the widest range of retail options as compared to its more rural neighbors, or even its large selection of local restaurants downtown. Middletown has continued to be an appealing place to spend time because it possesses key qualities that make residents, business owners, and visitors alike become attached to the City. These components; culture, social offerings, education, recreation, and many others all contribute to Middletown's strong sense of vibrancy.

The City first implemented a Commission for the Arts & Culture in the early 1970s, which continues to champion cultural activities within the City. The Office of Arts and Culture advertises hundreds of events each year within Middletown including Fall foliage cruises, family book clubs, climate action art walks, and concerts at Wadsworth Mansion. Many of these events draw spectators and participants from all over the State. In 2019, the City hosted its first “Middletown Pride” event which culminated with a parade down Main Street that drew thousands of attendees.

The City is also home to more than three museums, including a Military Museum within the City's Veterans Memorial Park that features a Huey Helicopter used during the Vietnam War. Downtown is also home to Kidcity Children's Museum, which features three floors of unique exhibits built and designed locally. This important attraction draws thousands of visitors each year from far beyond the City of Middletown. Another family-friendly downtown anchor is the Russel Library. Originally purchased as a gift and opened in 1876, the library has won numerous awards, hosted many events and programs, and exhibits various artists' works. According to the Connecticut Public Library's statistical profile, for the 2017-2018 fiscal year, the library saw a total circulation of over 271,000. Middletown is also home to several galleries, most notably the Davison Art Center (DAC) at Wesleyan University. The DAC is the curator of one of the largest collections of “works on paper” in North America, at over 25,000.

Middletown is also a place with many options for outdoor recreation. As of 2016, the City of Middletown had over 4000 acres of permanently preserved land. This equates to roughly 15 percent of the City's total area. There are over 30 separate and distinct locations that visitors have the opportunity to get out and explore the unique landscapes and vistas that Middletown has to offer, the largest of which is a 267-acre parcel known as Wadsworth Falls State Park.

The New England Scenic Trail also passes through Middletown which is part of the 825-mile Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System. As hikers make their way through Middletown, they are treated to views from Chauncy Peak as well as Higby Mountain. Aside from hiking, there is also ample opportunity for boating or kayaking, fishing, biking and picnicking. Since these parcels are widely dispersed throughout the City, the parcels themselves are not yet fully connected to function more cohesively as a greenway corridor and are not easily accessed by all residents.

Middletown has a small farming community working to contribute to the local agricultural sector. The scope and scale of Middletown's farms range from small hobby farms with only a handful of animals on the property to large farms producing for regional distribution. In 2016, the City partnered with Forest City Farms to allow the farming of a piece of land owned by the City. The products grown by the farm contribute to a Community Sourced Agriculture program. Forest City Farms also participates in local farmer's markets and sources directly to many downtown restaurants within the City.

As discussed earlier, Middletown's draw extends beyond shopping, restaurants, social gatherings, and nightlife opportunities; however, these activities are a large component of what makes Middletown attractive to the Millennial population that the City wishes to attract. In 2010, Gallup and The Knight Foundation, after surveying over 43,000 people across 26 different Cities and Towns nationwide published a "Soul of the Community" report. While Middletown was not one of the Towns that was included as part of the survey, its findings help to better illustrate exactly why Middletown has continued to see demand, why residents within the City are highly engaged and what Middletown can do moving forward to remain in a position to compete for new target populations.

Overall, the study had many findings but principally the Foundation developed a process to quantify residents' attachment to a particular place. The study found a positive correlation between a resident's level of attachment to their City or Town and the presence of key community components. The four largest categories that the study found directly related to a resident's feeling of pride for a community were; Social Offerings, Openness, Aesthetics, and Education. These components foster involvement, pride, social interaction, and an overall sense of community. These pieces all work together to allow residents to develop an emotional connection to the City they call home; all key components to fostering vibrancy.

Many of these components exist today in Middletown, and others should be expanded upon. Middletown has a breadth of cultural events causing the City to be viewed as increasingly welcoming to all. With an incredibly diverse school system and the presence of two colleges, the City of Middletown has always been seen as a place where learning and education are valued at all levels. In recent years Middletown has experienced a dramatic transformation in its downtown with several new restaurants on Main Street. Many of these establishments serve locally sourced food, offer live music, and outdoor dining. Now more than ever residents, visitors from neighboring Towns and people who are generally looking to spend time in a lively, safe and welcoming environment are turning to the City of Middletown. Moving forward the City should begin to think strategically so that it can capitalize on the elements that make it a strong and vibrant community to enhance its sense of place.

2. What are people saying?

Some of the most interesting and insightful comments throughout the public engagement portion of this plan related to Middletown's vibrancy. Many people feel very strongly that Middletown is incredibly vibrant already, and they see that as a source of pride for their community. There is no disagreement that Middletown is already an exciting place. Thus, the observations made by members of the public will only improve the City's strengths.

Almost unilaterally, most participants felt that the Riverfront corridor, in some way, was key to Middletown's future. It's important for any City to strike a balance between the natural and built environment. Throughout much of the public process, input gathered showed that residents felt there was too much brick, concrete and pavement downtown. Participants felt that walking from shop to shop, or from the Oddfellow's Playhouse to dinner was not enjoyable because the downtown core is so automobile-centric.

While improvements along the Riverfront is and has been seen as imperative, opinions differ greatly on exactly what should happen along the Connecticut River's West bank. Residents supported both projects along the river that included higher density housing with co-working or incubator spaces and alternatively total preservation with the addition of a limited trail corridor. Regardless of whichever direction the City takes with its Riverfront area, residents agree that it should be well thought out, and designed at a scale that matches the City today. Connecting downtown with any future activities along the river is vital, and to many residents, seen as a non-negotiable part of continued development downtown. To most, the long-term viability of any project along the river relies on how interconnected it is to downtown. It is widely viewed that the riverfront is underutilized today due to its lack of accessibility. The Riverfront was seen as a key anchor to help balance out the manmade elements downtown and provide an opportunity for folks to engage with nature in an area of the City where it is the hardest to come by.

Another key topic that was the source of much public input related specifically to the arts, on both large and small scales. Residents wanted the arts to have a stronger voice in Middletown. Many felt that while the arts and cultural events are abundant and play an important role in defining Middletown's identity, these events are under-publicized and the City should take formal action to support these efforts. With so much going on City-wide tied to arts and culture there was agreement that this key component of Middletown's identity should be more formally invested in. Residents felt this could be done in many different ways, ranging in scale from small, short-term ideas to longer more large-scale projects. In the short term, participants suggested that the City look to include various forms of public art, especially downtown and across multiple City parks. Residents desired murals on buildings, art on bus shelters or sculptures along Main Street to help engage pedestrians and foster conversation. In the long-term, an amphitheater open to the public that would function as a gathering space for music, theatre or prayer was seen as important and something the City is currently lacking.

One of the barriers seen by many when specifically discussing how Middletown can make itself better related to working on the "details" or small picture items. One observation made during the outreach process outlined that Middletown seems to be focusing little attention on the other commercial nodes within the City when it comes to making sure they are attractive, engaging, and bicycle and pedestrian-friendly. Many of the retail and service establishments

that residents use is not located downtown and therefore the downtown core should not receive all of the focus simply because that's what Middletown is most known for by non-residents.

3. What are the big ideas?

Middletown's should look as vibrant as it is.

A City requires a balance to have vibrancy. Middletown has already made great strides with being responsive to development trends. It has worked to foster and support locally owned businesses and funneled growth to appropriate areas all with the understanding that the City should control the footprint of its urban core. Middletown's land-use policies should look inward and prioritize the improvement of the City's sense of place. One observation made by residents during the public outreach process was that many of the City's commercial corridors can be made more aesthetically pleasing and more bicycle and pedestrian-friendly.

A community's "aesthetics", which can be defined as the physical beauty (both natural and manmade) of a place were shown to be one of the top three contributors to a resident's feeling of attachment to the place they lived. Middletown will benefit by placing emphasis on the aesthetics of its developed corridors. Other sections of this document identify that Middletown has an extreme variety of natural and green spaces available to residents, but the built environment is lacking attractive, engaging, and aesthetically pleasing improvements. Sculptures in City parks and murals and pocket parks downtown will enhance the City's physical characteristics and will leave a positive impression on its residents and visitors. The reconnection of Middletown to the waterfront will beautify the downtown by redirecting focus past Route 9 and onto the riverfront. Physical connections which may include bridges, pathways, tunnels or other connections themselves should be aesthetically pleasing and works of art. Vibrancy means many things to many people and part of what will allow Middletown to remain attractive to such a diverse population is ensuring that Middletown is and continues to be a place with a wide range of offerings.

Arts and Culture should be a fixture across Middletown.

Residents and visitors to the City must be engaged with their environment regardless if they set up for a picnic in a park or walk from shop to shop along Main Street. This engagement can be achieved through art. Middletown's arts and cultural community should be on full display across the City. This will increase the overall attractiveness of the area and will help engage people and foster a greater sense of community. Since these projects often take time, the City should begin by committing resources to this venture as soon as possible. With over 600 parking spaces in the downtown core, there is a significant amount of revenue that's generated from parking fees. Every year, the City should commit to funneling a portion of these fees to fund specific artistic and/or cultural improvements within key commercial nodes across the City.

Jobs are a key component to Middletown's future vibrancy.

Middletown has seen modest job growth in the City since 2010. The Healthcare industry experienced much of this growth. As mentioned in the demographic assessment within this

plan, the Healthcare industry is projected to see higher than average growth over the next 7 years. Furthermore, Fed-Ex recently constructed a new distribution facility that created more than 600 new jobs in the city. The growth in that industry coupled with the anticipated addition of over 1000 jobs at Pratt and Whitney anticipates adding over 1000 jobs at its facility on Aircraft Road puts the City of Middletown in a unique position to be able to capitalize on this job growth by attracting those that will ultimately fill those positions to establish roots in Middletown.

As important as job growth is for any City, it's important to keep in mind that job growth is only part of the equation. The workforce that will fill these technical positions in both healthcare and aerospace will not only make their employers stronger, but they will also contribute to the City's local economy. As these jobs are filled Middletown must find ways to engage with these employers to do that it can to encourage employees to live and spend time in the City outside of work.

Route 9 should be considered as a stage to showcase the City.

This plan addresses how the existing location of Route 9 is not ideal because it disconnects the City from the Riverfront. The City should continue to work with the CT Department of Transportation to identify fund and implement ways to reconnect the City to the Riverfront.

It is important to note that this section of Route 9 sees over 65,000 vehicle trips per day. This volume provides an opportunity for Middletown to use its frontage along Route 9 as a way to improve its presence along the highway. Currently, when highway travelers pass through Middletown, they are treated to the sight of an underutilized rail line, parking lots, unattractive high-density housing and the backside of retail and service buildings. In the short term, these areas should be greatly improved to include; additional green space, landscaping, screening, and murals on buildings much like the mural in Metro Square. Long term, the City should target future development that is sensitive not only to Main Street but also to the highway will all work to serve this goal.

4. What should we do?

- a. Work to implement a low-cost solution to help pull together the East and West sides of Main Street. Specifically, adding a “Welcome to Middletown” arch or “string lighting” should be examined to help unify both sides of the street.
- b. Work to begin the implementation of small-scale improvements along the Connecticut River. This could include kayak launches, a floating boat dock or small pier, etc. as a way to engage with a wider audience near downtown.
- c. The regulatory review process should demand improvements for non-motorized users in all development proposals including but not limited to; benches, landscaping, street lighting, wayfinding signage, and bike infrastructure when appropriate.
- d. Identify key locations across the City in both the built and natural environments as areas to showcase local artworks.
- e. Partner with local arts groups to develop key sites throughout the City for community themed murals and painted crosswalks.
- f. Identify a revenue source to directly fund “Artscape” improvement projects within key commercial corridors.
- g. The City should identify locations within the downtown core where the development of 4-6 “pocket parks” could be implemented using existing parking spaces.
- h. City officials should prioritize the acquisition of key parcels within the City to create a functioning greenway corridor.
- i. The regulatory environment should not be a barrier to business types that the City wishes to attract and retain downtown. Regulations should encourage these uses by eliminating parking minimums within the zones encompassing downtown. This will only increase flexibility long term in these areas as more private land is freed up from being used for parking.
- j. Begin an application and lottery system to allow local artists to paint and decorate City-wide trash compactors and recycle bins.
- k. The City should consider the establishment of a façade improvement loan program to ensure buildings that significantly contribute the Middletown’s character are preserved.
- l. The City’s Office of Arts and Culture should work with building owners along Route 9 to improve landscaping, provide areas to showcase local artworks and allow for building facades along the highway to be painted.
- m. Economic Development Officials should work to engage major employers to partner with downtown businesses to encourage employees to spend time downtown and in the City in general when not at work.